



Newsletter 39 Winter 2025

# The Thembisa Trust

Supporting grassroots development projects in Southern Africa

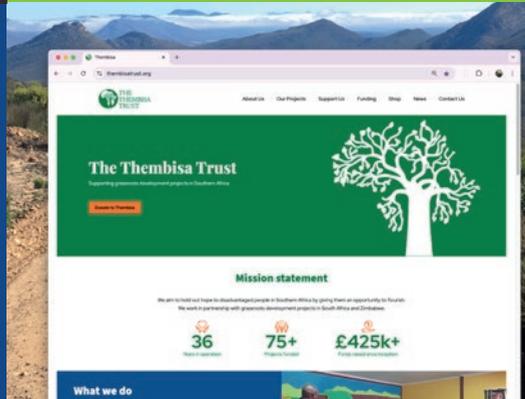


iThemba  
Siyakhula.  
We're growing. Together.  
See page 3

## Thembisa's new website

Explore the new site:  
<https://thembisatrust.org>

Let us know what you think.  
Your feedback means a lot to us!



### Contact Info:

34 Trinity Rd,  
Oxford, OX3 8LQ  
<https://thembisatrust.org>  
[contact@thembisatrust.org](mailto:contact@thembisatrust.org)

**Thembisa has no political affiliation**

### Patron:

Dame Janet Suzman

### Trustees:

Tonia Cape Bowley **Co-Founder**  
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## From our co-founder... Tonia Cope Bowley

### Kindness: A true story

It was a cold, miserable day in a large city. A resident was shopping when she noticed a small boy transfixed, staring at the shoes in the window. She stopped to ask him what he was doing there. 'I would love a pair of shoes,' he said.

Looking down, she noticed his filthy bare feet. Without hesitation, she took the little boy's hand and went in. First she selected some warm socks, before moving to the display of small shoes.

Next, she sat him down and asked the assistant for a bowl of water, and proceeded to wash his feet. On went a pair of warm socks followed by shoes that fitted perfectly. The boy looked up at her in astonishment and asked: 'Are you God's wife?' An example of how kindness speaks louder than words.

The world is a mess! The news won't let us forget this, but we cannot afford to be bogged down by the negative. There is always something we can do for someone.

Did you know the average age in Africa is 19? When Thembisa was founded in 1988, it was Stephen and my hope that Thembisa would grow so as to support more people in the future. Thembisa should target the young, giving a chance in life to leaders of the future.

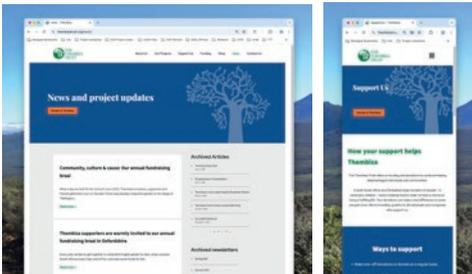
### The power of one

Our late patron, Desmond Tutu, always remembered the kindness and respect Trevor Huddleston had shown his mother. Not only did Bishop Tutu win the Nobel Peace Prize and write several books, but he cared deeply for the individual. He was an uncompromising foe of apartheid and a modern-day activist for racial justice.

Power and influence are not limited to the well-known. We can all do something for someone. My appeal to you today is do whatever you can to advance the aims of Thembisa. Who knows? Your actions may impact some unknown person who could shift focus away from greed, to much needed kindness.



## Our new website <https://thembisatrust.org>



Our previous website has served us well since we set it up in 2015, but it was time for a refresh! We hope that our new website will help us reach more people and extend our impact further. Please refer your friends to it, and let us know what you think!

Huge thanks to Samui (<https://samui.co.uk/>) for hosting it without charge over the years. Going forward we will be hosted by our website developer, **Ben Wheatley**.

## iThemba – changing what tomorrow looks like

<https://ithembaprojects.com/>

**Siyakhula. We're growing. Together.** That was the motto for 2024 of iThemba projects, working in the community of kwaMpumuzha near Pietermaritzburg. Sustainability is absolutely key to their approach. They don't tell the community what to do; they listen and let the community lead.

Early childhood development is promoted by mentors who encourage mothers to read to and play with their children. The mothers grow in confidence that they have the power to prepare their children for a better future, bringing hope to these families. Mentors also help preschool teachers to get the best out of the children.



Nutrition mentors help the community with their food gardens. A mother says: **'In January when parents struggle to pay school fees, my garden helps us all out – I can feed the kids from the garden until we have money again.'**

Every week, iThemba's youth mentors show up at 10 schools: doing assemblies, hanging out with kids, and teaching life skills classes. They create safe spaces for kids to talk about what matters – even hard things like bullying or abuse. A school principal says: **'You guys fit. You know the kids, and they know and trust you. That's why it works.'**

Followers become leaders! A full-time youth mentor who grew up participating in an iThemba programme says: 'I want to be a caring mentor to these kids, like the mentors I had, who gave me time and



attention when no-one else did that for me.' There are also youth camps, and on-going construction of extensions to the community youth centre. iThemba wants to reach 75% or more of the community to reach a tipping point in order to see permanent, whole-community change.

### Hope in action



This grandmother spends hours in her vegetable garden, using what she's learnt to grow food for her family and provide an income. Her grandson proudly shows off his own beds, which he diligently waters. She's also learnt to love what he loves, and spends time every day playing with and reading to him. With only one-third of South African children under 5 developmentally on track, and the projection that a child born today in SA is expected to realise only 43% of their potential by adulthood, this small snapshot speaks of hope. Hope for this little boy's education and nutrition – and for the neighbours who watch and want to be part of the hope too.

## Bonginkosi self-help project



Linda Grant, Board member of African Enterprise, is one of a team who regularly visit this project in the very impoverished community of Sweetwaters near Pietermaritzburg. The members are primarily grannies caring for orphaned children. They are encouraged to grow vegetables and to earn money through handicrafts, and are given food parcels. Linda explains: **'We remain intent – given the high levels of inequality and poverty – to always provide some food and donated clothing and fabric, but to continue balancing this with upskilling and empowerment.'**

A church service is also held every month. Londeka, who co-leads with Linda, commented: **'It's very important and fulfilling to share hope. So many people are stuck in poverty not only of the stomach but also of the mind.'**

### Linda wrote:

'The old Gogo's amongst our Bonginkosi members are real beacons of light in the community. We need to ensure that their influence and example penetrate the younger generation. I met a lady recently who mentioned that the vegetable gardening project she's involved with has advanced food security amongst 3000 people monthly. Londeka and I hope to facilitate this next year at Bonginkosi.'

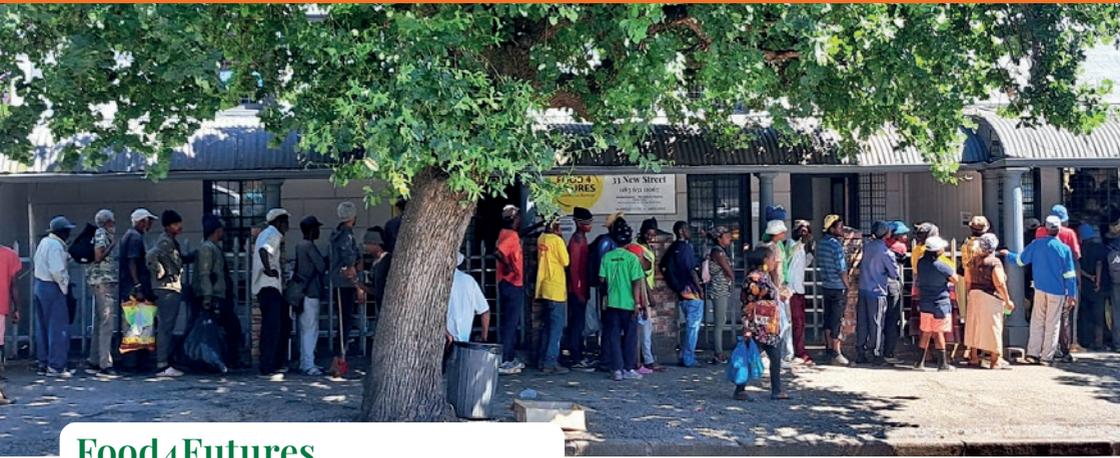
'There is no piped water in Sweetwaters at the moment and electricity is scarce. It's so tough on the folk. We are planning to draw on some of our funds to put in an extra rain tank alongside the vegetable gardens.'



### Examples of activities:

- A talk on diet and distribution of nutritious maize meal, hand-milled by a local friend, to members and to the creche.
- 25 ladies received training in basic beauty skills which hopefully they can use to earn some income. The Zimbabwean ladies in particular struggle to find employment.
- Christmas hampers of nearly new clothes and shoes, fabric and haberdashery items, fresh vegetables, non-perishable foods and laundry soap were distributed. 81 pairs of pre-loved school shoes were donated by a local school.





## Food4Futures

<https://food4futures.co.za>

Food4Futures–Ithemba Le Kamva (F4F) began as a project to alleviate hunger and that is still the main aim. However, the organisation now includes many other projects aimed at meeting needs in the local community of Makhanda (previously Grahamstown).

The core activity remains the provision of food parcels, each consisting of maize meal, rice, samp or flour and yeast, baked beans, sugar, tea, soup, salt, soap, and candles. Every Tuesday, volunteers also hand out about 300 peanut butter sandwiches. Although a sandwich once a week isn't enough to sustain anyone for a prolonged period, each sandwich is a bright spot in the lives of those who come – some may not have eaten in several days.

Many in the community do not have an ID for various reasons. Without one, people cannot get social welfare grants or apply for jobs. F4F works with the Department of Home Affairs to help people get their ID.

F4F also accepts donations of clothing and household items, and distributes them to those in need. They try to collect at least 250 blankets each year to give to parcel recipients and car guards. For many in South Africa, guarding cars while the owners shop is the only way to earn an income. The Parking4Parcels project allows members of the public to purchase vouchers that can be given to the guards and can be redeemed at F4F for food parcels or other essentials.

## Typical recipients

Sylvia Komsani, a pensioner living in a very meagre home, needs money to buy food for her nephew, Lendani, aged 35. He moved in with her after living on a rubbish tip and has no income at all. He needs a replacement ID to register for a R350 (£16) grant, which will help him and his aunt a lot. (Editor's note: while many costs such as accommodation are much lower in SA than in the UK, food is not hugely cheaper.) Sthembiso Memani, 21, lives in a tent-like shelter at the tip, where he works to scratch out a living. He needs a new ID in order to be able to find more gainful employment.

## Eluxolweni boys' shelter

<https://eluxolwenicharitabletrust.co.za>

The Eluxolweni Child and Youth Care Centre (EYCC) provides a home for approximately 20 neglected and vulnerable boys from Makhanda (Grahamstown) and other parts of the Eastern Cape. The staff work very hard, always with budgetary constraints, to meet the boys' complex physical, mental and emotional needs and to give them a sound basis for flourishing in life.

Last year Thembisa granted £600 to Eluxolweni to replace the old bunk beds. Things don't always proceed smoothly! The first supplier failed to provide the promised beds for many months, and the Centre had to look elsewhere. The new bunk beds have now been received, making the centre that bit more comfortable and homely for the boys.

# Mama Ntombi's Community Projects – bringing hope to the young

<https://mncp.co.za/>

Mama Ntombi's Community Projects (MNCP) aims to help orphaned and vulnerable children to become achievers in life. MNCP offers hope and support to the wider community in three impoverished areas near Pietermaritzburg. MNCP's activities include the provision of nutritious breakfasts for children who would otherwise be too hungry to learn well; Reading and Homework Clubs; Mentorship Groups for boys and for girls; and community support and assistance as needed – for example, helping those who have lost everything in a shack fire; obtaining of identity documents; and provision of emergency food supplies.

Solomon Qadi, MNCP's social worker, was the go-to person in these communities. Solomon recently had to step down due to family reasons. Msizi Ngcobo, one of MNCP's beneficiaries from a child-headed household, has succeeded him. Msizi has been mentored by Solomon since 2017 and has demonstrated exceptional leadership skills. He has stepped into taking care of the Centre, responding to community calls, and teaching at the Preschool, Reading Club, and boys Mentorship Programmes.

Thembisa has committed to covering MNCP's social worker's salary of £5000 per

annum. This is hugely important because donors often prefer to pay for tangible items rather than running costs such as a salary. Thank you to our donors for making this possible! We would love to be able to donate additional funds on top of this sum, to support even more of MNCP's projects.

## Preschool celebration

About 20 children attend the preschool again this year, run by MNCP, which equips them with basic skills and enrichment. This foundation gives the children a head start for when they transition to state school. MNCP holds a Graduation ceremony to celebrate the completion of the academic year – a moving experience for the children and their families. More than just marking an academic milestone, this helps to instil confidence and self-esteem.

## Youth empowerment seminar

This seminar for young people was held following the sad suicide of some young men. Valuable input was provided by 'Single Moms Raising Sons'. The speakers



*Solomon with Tonia, in 2023.*



*The preschool graduation ceremony helps instil self-esteem in young children. It wouldn't be a party without a meal!*



addressed real-life issues and challenges faced by the participants. Group discussions enabled the young people to gain confidence and self-expression. One said 'I loved hearing from others and sharing my own thoughts and experiences. It felt like a safe space to be myself.'

A brave conversation about mental health and suicide encouraged the young people to speak openly and seek help when needed. An engaging session emphasised the importance of education and provided valuable tips on overcoming study challenges.

### ... from a young man helped by MNCP

Siyanda Innocent Funeka comes from a desperately poor family, cared for by his grandmother as his mother had to work in another city. His life was marked by poverty, begging for food, and rummaging through trash. However, under the mentorship of MNCP's Team, especially Solomon, he acquired a strong work ethic. After he had completed high school, MNCP helped him secure a 6-month internship with Microsoft, followed by further internships.



Siyanda faced another setback when his family was forced to leave their home. Siyanda and his brother had to find their own room. MNCP stepped in with financial support and essential items to help them get settled. Siyanda has put aside his dreams of further education in order to earn money to support his siblings, and now has a job with a bank. He wrote this letter to MNCP donors (we've shortened the letter but they are all his own words!).

Dear valued donors,

I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering support, which has enabled me to transform my life in ways I never thought possible. As a child, I faced unimaginable hardships growing up in a small rural settlement. I struggled with poverty, hunger, and a lack of access to basic necessities. ... The absence of my father and the loss of my siblings to suicide only added to the pain and desperation I felt.

But despite these challenges, MNCP saw potential in me and offered a helping hand. Through their comprehensive programs, I gained access to education, mentorship, and guidance, which have been instrumental in shaping me into the person I am today. They gave me a home, love, care and a family.

Please know that your donations are not just a handout; they are a hand up, empowering us to become productive members of society. Your investment in MNCP is an investment in our future, and I am living proof of the impact your support can have.

Thank you for believing in us and for your continued support. Your generosity will help MNCP reach even more children and young people, providing them with the same opportunities I have had. Together, we can create a brighter future for generations to come.

Siyanda



*Seminars provide training in life skills and a safe space for attendees to discuss difficult issues.*

## Alternative To Violence Project Zimbabwe (AVPZ)

**'It is my conviction that peace education is a prerequisite/necessity and the only major way for Zimbabwe to traverse in order to abandon the conflict trap and the cycle of violence.'** Quote from Medial Hove, University of Zimbabwe.

AVPZ, a voluntary community peace initiative in Zimbabwe, is addressing this need with courses that examine the root causes of violence, transform mindsets, and provide non-violent ways to resolve conflicts. Based on a programme originally developed in the USA to help prisoners learn to control their violent impulses, it uses experiential learning. Trained facilitators lead courses for community participants and for schools. Teachers who receive training are supported to set up Peace Clubs in their schools.

In December 2023 Tonia Cope Bowley launched a special 80th birthday appeal

to raise funds for AVPZ through Thembisa. £1810 was raised, enough to cover the costs of one and a half courses. We received reports on two of the courses. Attendees included university students, police/military officers, a politician, teachers/lecturers, and entrepreneurs.

The 16 participants attending the first course wanted to develop skills to tackle violence in their life context. Some of their stories were heart-breaking – e.g:

'Growing up my father used to beat my mother so much .... I developed a habit of beating other children at school ... I had fears that I would beat up my children. I don't... but the spirit is still there, I [want to] find myself so I can share the same space with others peacefully.'

Participants felt listened to and found the facilitators inspiring. Comments included 'The workshops should be taken to schools' and 'Even couples need such workshops because there is a lot of domestic violence.'

The 18 attendees at the second course wanted to understand the conflict resolution process. The workshop provided a safe space for the participants to open up and talk about their past and embark on a healing process. They said that at the workshop they gained knowledge and therapy at the same time!



## New Cross Over schools being established

Zimbabwe is in a dire state, with an ongoing drought, high unemployment, and a broken education system. Cross Over, started 18 years ago by Deb Norton, aims to transform lives by providing holistic education to children who had missed out on schooling due to neglect, lack of funds, or caring responsibilities.

Cross Over started as a single school in Harare in 2007. Students were taught by mentors who also cared for their social, mental and spiritual welfare. Teaching resources were developed specifically for their context.



In 2022 the team decided to focus on developing resources and providing them to separate learning stations set up by mentors, churches, or other groups keen to provide education. Letting go of their own learning station was challenging. But God helped them to transition, and in 2023 the Cross Over syllabus reached over 120 children in six different contexts and communities.

Two new sites opened in 2024 and two more in 2025. Cross Over provides the sites with kits containing all the resources they need. Earlier, Deb wrote: 'The two (previously bare) rooms in Epworth are now alive with colourful charts representing hours of targeted learning activities. ... Across the country 600 km away, a similar transformation has taken place in a

classroom serving 20 students.' At these sites, supplementary feeding is provided for 40 children who are too hungry to be able to focus on their lessons.

Deb also wrote: 'We love how the mentors who serve these children step out day by day with faith and courage to teach from our files with the barest minimum of training. We are thankful for the three start up schools who continue to strive with difficult economics to serve other children.' It is Cross Over's dream to be able to run more in-person training of mentors.

Restaurant Day is one of three specially designed activity days where students spend the whole day applying all their learning as they role play being customers or waiters in a restaurant (watch a video at <https://youtu.be/FGO8vfokeSU>).

## Helping the desperately poor in Chishawasha



Zimbabwe continues to experience a serious drought, which has meant that 40% of children going to school are malnourished and many families are starving. In the Chishawasha area people were hoping for good rains so that it would be possible to grow maize, but they have experienced many weeks without any rain in the middle of the rainy season.

Maggie Norton is our contact in Harare who uses funds sent by Thembisa to help the very poor. There is so much need and sadness, on a scale that we in the UK can scarcely imagine, and Maggie needs great wisdom and compassion to use the funds as wisely as possible. Women looking after children regularly come and ask for food

packs. Others ask for help with hospital fees. In one recent case a woman asked for the costs of a scan, but when Maggie looked at the hospital letter it was 3 years old! The fact that the woman had walked 8 km with this request is a measure of people's desperation.

One of the genuine cases was Wadsi, an HIV-positive young woman who got tuberculosis. Maggie helped with hospital fees but sadly Wadsi died, leaving a baby daughter. Wadsi's sister Hazel – the only surviving daughter of five in the family – will now look after the baby.

A happier outcome was the provision of a walker to a little disabled girl so that she can be a bit more independent.

### Trustee & supporter news

Thank you to **Caroline Mathew** who took over as Treasurer/Administrator in 2024. Caroline has been a Trustee for some years, helping us with sales and research. She and her husband John divide their time between the UK and South Africa.



We are delighted to welcome **Taryn Wheatley** as our new Social Media Manager. She works in technology marketing, and brings much needed expertise to us! Taryn posts items about Thembisa and our projects on Facebook and Instagram. Do look out for, and like and share, our posts ([Thembisa Trust | Facebook](#) and [@thembisatrust](#) if you are reading an electronic version). Taryn is originally South African but now lives in Oxford with Ben and their children Isla and Joe.



We've also welcomed **Ben Wheatley**, Taryn's husband, as our website manager and assistant treasurer. Ben has worked incredibly hard to set up our new website. Be sure to check it out! Ben is British but has lived in South Africa, where he saw first-hand the impact that poverty has on peoples' lives. He likes to make a real difference through The Thembisa Trust.

### Donating to Thembisa

We welcome donations either online (<https://thembisatrust.org>) or by cheque to The Thembisa Trust, 34 Trinity Road, Oxford OX38LQ. If your donation can be gift-aided, please let us know.



### Tribute: Peter Braithwaite

We are very sad to report the death of Peter Braithwaite on 8 August 2025. Peter was our Treasurer/Administrator for more than 25 years. Peter and Thembisa found each other in the 1990s through the organisation REACH. Peter wanted to volunteer with a charity as he moved from full time work in IT. He helped to get our finances onto a professional footing and to raise and manage funds for the many projects we support. With his business acumen and proactive thinking, he provided wise input into our processes, ensuring that they were efficient and of maximum benefit. Peter was supported by his wife Jen and they were both great supporters of Thembisa, always attending and providing prizes for our annual garden party and walks, and persuading many of their friends to attend. We are immeasurably indebted to Peter for his financial oversight, meticulous minutes, guidance and friendship. Our thoughts continue to be with Jen and family.

We are grateful that we were able to formally thank Peter for his service at a lunch in November 2024 attended by some of the Trustees. At the same time we celebrated the 80th birthdays in 2024 of Peter and Tonia Cope Bowley.



*From left: Peter and Jen, Trustees Jennifer, Liz, Tonia and Grace.*



## Tribute: Mike Low

We were very saddened by the premature death of Mike Low (1966–2025). Mike was a key player in the early days of Thembisa, serving as Chair of the Trustees for a while. He and Jacquie continued to support us as they moved overseas and later returned to Oxford. Mike worked for over 20 years in International Development, and had a real heart for the poor and disadvantaged, a theme that was noted by many who gave donations in his memory – raising an astonishing sum of over £2500 for Thembisa. We extend our thanks and love to Jacquie, Archie and Annabelle.

## Thembisa's 2025 fund-raising braai

On 22 June 2025, Thembisa supporters and friends gathered in Tonia Cope Bowley's beautiful garden in Tiddington for our annual fundraising braai. Frank and Bev took charge of the braai, serving up delicious boerewors and hamburgers. Alongside the food, we held a silent auction with some lovely prizes, and opened our small pop-up shop, also available online, filled with cards and gifts from home.

Including donations, this year's braai raised £1,001, all of which will go directly to Mama Ntombi's Community Projects (see page 6). The money will go towards the £5,000 per annum salary of MNCP's social worker. If you couldn't make it to the braai but would still like to support the work of

Thembisa, it's not too late to donate via our website or by cheque.



## From the Chair... Frank Adam

Dear Friends and Supporters,  
As we step into a new chapter for Thembisa, I want to take a moment to reflect on the profound impact we have had together and to look forward with hope and purpose.

For many years, Thembisa has been a beacon of hope and kindness, supporting grassroots development projects across South Africa and Zimbabwe. From empowering communities through education and skills training to fostering sustainable initiatives that uplift lives, our Trust has remained steadfast in its mission to make a difference where it matters most.

We have recently welcomed new trustees who bring fresh perspectives. Looking ahead, our vision is ambitious yet

deeply rooted in our core values. We aim to expand our impact and connect with a new generation of supporters who share our passion for creating positive change. To this end, we are revitalising our online presence to better tell the stories of hope and resilience that define our work.

But we cannot do this alone. Thembisa has always been a collective effort, and it is the support of people like you that turns dreams into reality. As we evolve, we invite you to journey with us—whether by spreading the word, volunteering your time, or contributing to our projects. Together, we can amplify the light of hope and kindness in a world that needs it more than ever.

Thank you for standing with Thembisa. Here's to future growth, renewal, and even greater impact.

## Project funding 2022–2025

Our financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March.

Project	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
<b>Mama Ntombi's Community Projects (MNCP)</b> Supporting the community in informal settlements, Pietermaritzburg	£7800 <sup>a</sup>	£5500 <sup>b</sup>	£5000 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Sweetwaters Bonginkosi Self-help Project</b> Income-generating projects, help as needed, KwaZulu/Natal	£500	£1100	–
<b>iThemba Community Projects</b> Community upliftment programmes, KwaZulu/Natal	–	£500	£600
<b>Food4Futures</b> Emergency food provision and other help, Makhanda (previously Grahamstown), Eastern Cape	£1000	£750	£600
<b>Eluxolweni Boys' Home</b> Care for neglected boys, Makhanda (previously Grahamstown), Eastern Cape	–	£500	£600
<b>Chishawasha</b> Meeting needs in the community, Zimbabwe	£1000	£750	£600
<b>Cross Over</b> Educational programme, Zimbabwe	£504	£750	£620
<b>Alternative To Violence Project Zimbabwe (AVPZ)</b> Community peace initiative, Zimbabwe	–	–	£1810 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>£10,804</b>	<b>£9850</b>	<b>£9830</b>

**a** Included £2400 raised specifically towards the cost of a generator.

**b** We have committed to paying £5000 p.a. as a salary for MNCP's social worker.

**c** Earmarked money raised in response to Tonia Cope Bowley's 80th birthday appeal.